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DRAFT REPORT

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Volodymyr Y. YELCHENKO (Ukraine)

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: EVALUATION

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information

1. At its 6th to 8th meetings, on 5 and 6 June 1996, the Committee considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the Department of Public Information, transmitted to it in a note by the Secretary-General (E/AC.51/1996/2).

Discussion

2. Many delegations found the report to be useful and were in general agreement with most of the recommendations contained therein. A number of delegations stated that the report lacked in-depth analyses. Several delegations stated that the report was a good starting point for the process of review of the Department of Public Information, but that, considering the findings, the recommendations could have been more forceful. Many delegations commended the excellent efforts of the Department during the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. They also noted the reference in the report to the reform efforts made by the Department in recent years, efforts that should be encouraged in order for the Department to fully accomplish the tasks assigned to it by the General Assembly. One delegation welcomed the role played by the United Nations Information Centre operating in its capital, particularly

regarding the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. Another delegation highlighted the statement in the report that a major element of the work programmes of the United Nations information centres related to the various United Nations observances, which, according to the Joint Inspection Unit, were of limited value. That delegation also indicated that an examination of the allocation of resources among the various activities in the work programmes of the information centres would be useful, with a view to determining the appropriate focus of the centres' activities.

3. Some delegations stated that the Committee on Information should have received and reviewed the evaluation prior to its consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Most delegations stated that efforts to improve the public image of the United Nations were crucial and that senior officials should participate positively in this regard. Several delegations stressed the need to ensure that information disseminated was neutral and balanced. A number of delegations stressed the need to give effective public information coverage to all priority areas approved by the General Assembly, particularly those related to development and international cooperation.

4. Regarding the question of mandates given to the Department of Public Information, some delegations stated that a review of the numerous mandates of the Department was required and requested that a full list of such mandates be provided by the Secretariat. A number of delegations considered that, without prejudice to priorities set by the General Assembly, the Department should draw up a list of the active mandates and propose an annual priority programme for consideration by the Committee on Information; other delegations considered that such information should be given in the context of the priorities set by the General Assembly in the medium-term plan and its revisions. One delegation stated that this programme should be flexible enough to accommodate unexpected events. With regard to the "Blue Boots", a number of delegations were concerned about the addition by the Secretariat of outputs without specific mandates which may involve, in some cases, substantial amounts of resources, including from peace-keeping operations budgets. Other delegations expressed appreciation for such outputs, which were found to be useful.

5. Several delegations stressed the importance of new technologies in disseminating information, and commended the Department for its initiatives in this area. Other delegations noted that the Department should facilitate access to information in countries where new technologies were not widespread, and should be mindful of technological gaps among Member States. Many delegations emphasized that access to United Nations documents through the use of new technology should not substitute for the distribution of printed documentation and should remain free of charge. In that connection, some delegations stressed the need for more active involvement of United Nations Development Programme offices, in cases where there was no United Nations information centre, in the process of dissemination of information about the United Nations. Other delegations noted that increased use of technology should bring savings in the longer term. Several delegations stressed the need to ensure that all publications were in all six official languages.

6. Many delegations stressed the need to establish standard procedures for countering criticism, as well as the importance of an established system to

determine the needs of target audiences. Many delegations expressed concern about the lack of quality control regarding United Nations publications and the continuing evidence of duplication in that area. Others expressed their satisfaction with those publications. Some delegations were concerned about the cost-efficiency of Library services. Several delegations stressed the continued usefulness of the services provided. Several delegations stated that those services should answer the needs of all users. Some delegations, recalling the programmatic and coordination focus of the Committee, stated that the issue of cost-effectiveness should not be the principal factor in its decisions. In that connection, they recalled the roles of the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as bodies that deal with administrative and budgetary questions. Other delegations noted that if the Committee for Programme and Coordination was making recommendations with financial consequences, questions of cost-effectiveness were relevant. Some delegations felt that greater coordination in the delivery of Library and related services provided by the Secretariat was required.

7. Some delegations were pleased with the Department's statement that reviews of the operations of the United Nations information centres and the Dag Hammarkjöld Library, as called for in the draft resolution adopted by the Committee on Information in May, would address many of the concerns raised about those two programmes. Several delegations stressed the importance of United Nations information centres.

8. In the course of the debate, delegations made observations on a number of recommendations contained in the report.

9. Recommendations 1 and 2. A number of delegations considered that the recommendations should include explicit reference to "governmental" agencies of information, as stated in General Assembly resolution 13(I).

10. Recommendation 4. A number of delegations considered that the recommendation did not address many of the problems described in the report, in particular the weaknesses of feedback mechanisms and the work of the Programme Evaluation and Committee Liaison Unit. Some delegations stated that they could only accept recommendation 4.C on the understanding that the Secretariat had to publish all materials listed in the programme budget as approved by the General Assembly. Other delegations strongly supported the recommendation.

11. Recommendation 6. Some delegations had strong reservations on the development of a radio broadcasting capacity, stating that such capacity should be based on a demonstrated demand, and that its managerial and cost-benefit implications should be looked into before any decision was made. Other delegations, however, stressed that the needs and demands of developing countries should be taken into account in any cost-benefit approach. One delegation suggested that the United Nations could strengthen its relations with radio broadcasting stations of interested Member States with a view to providing information on United Nations matters.

12. Recommendation 9. Several delegations considered that the central role of the Spokesperson should not be compromised by direct access of the press to

United Nations senior officials. Other delegations considered it essential that such officials maintain an appropriate relationship with the press.

13. Recommendation 14. Many delegations had strong reservations on section B of this recommendation and felt its implementation could create a number of difficulties. Other delegations recalled that the Committee on Information, at its eighteenth session, in paragraph 12 of draft resolution B, welcomed the action taken by some Member States with regard to financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals and invited the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional and voluntary support on a national basis.

14. Recommendations 15 and 16. Some delegations considered that these recommendations should be implemented taking into account the various national interests and contexts. Another delegation stressed the need to ensure that collaboration with non-governmental organizations strictly adhere to the requirements of the relevant General Assembly resolutions on the matter.

15. Recommendation 17. Several delegations questioned the use of extrabudgetary funds in this context and stated that the restriction of the recommendation to Headquarters, Geneva and Vienna was discriminatory with respect to guided visits. In this regard, one delegation requested the Department to look at the possibility of introducing guided visits to the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

16. Recommendation 20. Some delegations questioned the usefulness of establishing a revolving fund and made reservations thereon.

Conclusions and recommendations

17. The Committee recognized the importance of the Department's activities and expressed its appreciation for the report, which it found to be comprehensive.

18. The Committee endorsed recommendations 1 to 13, 14.A, 15, 16, 18 and 19, with the following modifications and understandings:

Recommendation 1

The words "established agencies of information" were replaced by the words "established governmental and non-governmental agencies of information";

Recommendation 2.B

The words "public and private information agencies" were replaced by the words "governmental and non-governmental information agencies";

Recommendation 4.C

On the understanding that the Secretariat will publish all materials listed in the programme budget as approved by the General Assembly;

Recommendations 15 and 16

On the understanding that these recommendations should be implemented taking into account the various national interests and contexts and that collaboration with non-governmental organizations would strictly adhere to the requirements of the relevant General Assembly resolutions on the matter.

19. The Committee decided that the report, together with its conclusions and recommendations thereon, should be transmitted to the Committee on Information at its nineteenth session for consideration and appropriate action. The Committee invites the extended bureau of the Committee on Information to follow up the recommendations endorsed above.